Robert L. Sandvig

Robert LeRoy Sandvig (Sandy) was born to Martin and Julia Sandvig on September 11, 1923 in Lead, South Dakota where he remained until he graduated from high school. In 1941 he enrolled in the School of Mines and graduated with a B.S. in Chemical Engineering in 1944. After graduation, he worked for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics in Langley Field, Virginia. He stayed at this position for only two months when he decided that he needed to serve his country. Sandy joined the Navy and served two years as an Ensign on board the USS Quincy. In 1946, after the war he returned to the School of Mines as an assistant to professors teaching first year college chemistry. It was this experience that convinced him to obtain his advanced degrees and to become a professor. He received his MS in ChE in 1948 from the University of Cincinnati and his Ph.D. in 1953 from the University of Colorado.

In 1949, after receiving his MS Sandy accepted a position at the School of Mines as an instructor. He remained at there for the next forty years. During his years of service at Tech he held virtually every academic position from Instructor to Department Head and finally as Professor Emeritus, following his retirement in June 1987. Dr. Sandvig had a sincere concern for the welfare of his students. Throughout his career, he stayed very active in student activities. He served as the faculty advisor for freshmen through graduate students, served as an officer of the Alumni of Theta Tau and provided guidance to student members of AICHE as the faculty advisor. He was well known around the campus for the great rapport he had with his students. He earned the respect and admiration of the students in his department by fostering an environment that encouraged friendship and team work while promoting a strict standard of excellence. The relationship he had with his students is summarized best in a letter one of his former students wrote upon Dr. Sandvig’s retirement; “he was a scientist, engineer, educator, counselor – and most of all a friend.”

In August 1973, Dr. Sandvig was promoted to Professor and Head of the Chemical Engineering Department. During his tenure as department head, he proved to be a very competent and effective administrator. He is remembered around campus for his efforts in recruiting, acquiring money form industry to support the department and for establishing the first ChE Advisory Board, which served as a model for Tech. Under his leadership the Chemistry department and Chemical Engineering Department were successfully merged. He became the first department head of the combined departments in 1985 and remained in that position until his retirement. As stated in The Hardrocker, Dr. Sandvig “… is considered to have been one of the most effective administrators the institution has had.”

After retirement, he continued to be active in education by volunteering at an elementary school where he was known as “Grandpa Bob” to all the students. In true form to his background, he gave an annual demonstration to the sixth grade class on the laws of chemistry.

Sandy married N. June Oleson on July 29, 1957 and they had three daughters: Linda Leiding of Lake Crystal, MN; Kellie Williams (GeoE ’85) of Huntsville, AL; and Julie Young of Peoria, AZ. Dr. Sandvig died on November 25, 2010 and June Sandvig can be reached at c/o Linda Leiding 50100 224th St, Lake Crystal, MN 56055.

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